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## ABSTRACT

Relationships between the function and content of maternal interventions to control their toddlers' behavior and behavior problems and compliance in the child's fifth year were studied. Naturalistic observation of 51 dyads consisting of depressed and nondepressed mothers and their children who were 1.5 to 3.5 years old at the time of first observation and 5 years old during the second observation revealed that "do commands," interventions regarding chores, and interpersonal behaviors increased with age during the toddler period, while interventions concerning protection of objects decreased. Interventions concerning prosocial behaviors and chores tended to be positively related with "do commands." Interventions concerning self-control, protection of objects, and location were positively associated with "don't commands." There were several correlations between the content and function of maternal controls and socioeconomic status and contemporaneous measures of children's compliance. Maternal use of "do commands" and commands regarding prosocial issues, chores, and location of child at the time of the first observation were associated with fewer behavior problems in the child's fifth year. Maternal commands focusing on regulation of interpersonal and self-control issues were associated with more behavior problems among 5-year-olds. The frequency of "do commands" and control issues concerning chores, interpersonal behaviors, and cognitive and play activities at the first observation were also predictive of children's compliance at the second observation. Findings are discussed in terms of parental socialization pressures, maturity demands, and potential contributions of child's behavior. (Author/RH)

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PREDICTING CHILDREN'S PROBLEM BEHAVIORS FROM THE CONTENT OF MATERNAL DEMANDS

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## ABSTRACT

Examined the relationship between the function and content of maternal interventions to control their toddler-age children's behavior and subsequent behavior problems and compliance at age 5. Ss were 51 mothers and their children who were 1 1/2 to 3 1/2-years-old at the time of the first observations and 5-years-old during the second time of observation. Data were coded from videotapes of spontaneous interactions in a naturalistic apartment setting. "Do commands" and interventions concerning regarding chores, and interpersonal behaviors increased with age during the toddler period whereas interventions concerning protection of objects decreased with age. Interventions concerning prosocial behaviors and chores tended to be positively related with " do commands;" interventions concerning self-control, protection of objects and location were positively associated with "don't commands". Several correlations were found between the content and function of maternal controls and SES and contemporaneous measures of children's compliance.

Maternal use (at Time 1) of do commands, as well as commands regarding prosocial issues, chores, and location of child were all associated with fewer behavior problems at age 5. Maternal commands focused on regulation of interpersonal and self-control issues were associated with more behavior problems at age 5. The frequency of "do commands" and control issues concerning chores, interpersonal behaviors, and cognitive/play activities at Time 1 were also predictors of children's compliance at Time 2. Findings will be discussed in terms of parental socialization pressures, maturity demands, and potential contribution of child's behavior.

Research on socialization has focused almost exclusively on parents' techniques and strategies for influencing children. However, the function and content of maternal demands has received little attention. On a daily basis parents use their controls for a wide variety of purposes (Table 1). These can be described in terms of their immediate function (e.g. initiate, stop, modify the child's ongoing behavior) and in terms of their content or control issue (e.g. regulate social interactions, promote self-control; teach children family routines and prosocial behaviors; promote intellectually valuable experiences; protect objects...). Individual differences in the kinds of behaviors that parents choose to control in the course of interaction may provide clues concerning adaptive and maladaptive outcomes in children's social and intellectual development (e.g. Baumrind, 1973; Carew, 1980, Maccoby, 1980, Rheingold, 1980).

#### PURPOSE

1. To explore the interactional context of the content and immediate function of maternal controls during the toddler period. These measures were correlated with SES, Child's age, contemporaneous measures of children's compliance. Associations between the content and function categories were also explored. (Tables 2-3).
2. To relate individual differences in the content and function of maternal controls on toddler age children with indices of children's subsequent social development (compliance, behavior problems) at age 5.

Following research by Baumrind (1971) on the construct of parental "maturity demands" it was predicted that frequent interventions to promote children's performance of prosocial behaviors, household chores and cognitive activities would be associated with fewer behavior problems in children's subsequent development. (Tables 4-5).

## METHOD

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The subjects were 51 dyads consisting of depressed and nondepressed mothers and their young children who were 1 1/2 to 3 1/2 years old at the time of the first observations and 5 years old during the second time of observation. The data were sampled from videotapes of 9 hours of spontaneous interactions in a home-like apartment setting. Maternal behaviors at Time 1 (Toddler Period) were coded in terms of their immediate function and in terms of their content. Also coded were children's compliance to maternal requests at time 1 (toddler-age) and Time 2 (age-5). Mothers' perceptions of behavior problems (CBCL, Achenbach & Edelbrock) in their children were also obtained at age 5.

## RESULTS

### Interactional Context (Toddler Period)

Analyses were first conducted to examine the interactional context of maternal demands. 1). Partial correlations indicated that "do commands" and interventions regarding chores, and interpersonal behaviors increased with age during the toddler period whereas interventions requiring passive submission and the protection of objects decreased with age. 2) Interventions regarding prosocial behaviors and physical care were positively related with SES whereas interventions regarding child's location were negatively related with SES. The several correlations with SES and contemporaneous measures of children's compliance indicated that these ought to be controlled in correlational analyses between maternal interventions and subsequent child outcomes.

3) Functions and contents of commands were interrelated dimensions of parental interventions. Interventions concerning prosocial behavior, chores and cognitive/play activities tended to be positively related with "do commands" whereas interventions concerning self-control behaviors, interpersonal behaviors, protection of objects and location were associated with "don't commands".

### Associations With Children's Social Development (Age 5)

Because of the association of maternal SES and child compliance with the various maternal contents at Time 1, these were partialled out from correlations between maternal behaviors at Time 1 and measures of children's social development at Time 2.

1) Maternal use (at Time 1) of do commands, and future- oriented commands as well as commands regarding prosocial behavior, chores, and location were all associated with fewer behavior problems at age 5. 2) Maternal use of modification commands and commands focussed on regulation of interpersonal and self-control issues were associated with more behavior problems at age 5. 3) The use of "Do" commands and commands focussed on chores, sociability, and cognitive/play activities were positively associated with subsequent compliance. 4) The use of passive submission commands and commands dealing with physical care were negatively associated with subsequent compliance.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. This study found support for hypothesis that specific parental socialization pressures conceptualized as "maturity demands" are associated with positive outcomes in children's subsequent development.
2. A more general conclusion is that measures of the function and content of parental controls are worth exploring in future empirical and theoretical studies. The socialization environment provided by the parent has been almost exclusively conceptualized in terms of parental strategies, not in terms of specific socialization pressures, socialization goals and other functions of control. It may be that the purposes to which parental controls are put are as important as the parent's control strategies in predicting adaptive and maladaptive outcomes in children.

## DESIGN OF STUDY

DIAGNOSTIC GROUPS (SADS-L, R.D.C. Criteria)

TIME 1: Normal  $n = 33$   
 Unipolar Depression  $n = 37$

Diagnostic groups collapsed  
 for this study.

TIME 2: Normal  $n = 25$   
 Unipolar Depression  $n = 26$

AGE OF CHILD

TIME 1: 16 to 51 months ("Toddlers")

TIME 2: 5 years

OBSERVATIONAL DATA

Coded from videotapes of spontaneous mother-child interactions obtained in the context of a naturalistic apartment suite setting.

Time 1: Mother Functions of Maternal Interventions

Contents of Maternal Interventions

Child Compliance to mother's requests  
 (proportion of total interventions to which child  
 complied immediately)

Time 2: Child Compliance to mother's requests  
 (proportion of total interventions to which child  
 complied immediately)

Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior Problems  
 (CBCL, Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; completed by mother)

Table 1

## BEHAVIOR CODES: MOTHERS' BEHAVIOR (TODDLER PERIOD)

FUNCTION OF MATERNAL INTERVENTIONS

Initiation commands	Initiate a new behavior. "do commands" e.g. "Tie your shoe;" "Clean up."
Prohibition commands	Stop ongoing behavior. Refuse child overtures. "Don't" commands
Change Commands	Correct, modify, motivate, maintain, facilitate ongoing behavior. e.g. "slowly" "carefully;" "neatly;" "Use a bigger spoon" "Do all of them"
Submission Commands	Secure passive cooperation with maternal procedure. e.g. raise arms to put on sweater; present face for washing; open mouth for feeding. sit still while being changed.
Future-oriented	Promote, prevent behavior in future. "Be good while I'm gone;" "Never touch this;" "Always say 'Thank You'".

CONTENT OF MATERNAL INTERVENTIONS

Prosocial	Behave in a way that primarily benefits <u>another</u> person physically, psychologically, materially instrumentally. E.g. "Take care of your brother" "Kiss your dolly" "Share your cookies" "Put the newspaper back for me"; "Get her a Kleenex".
Chores	Perform chores and responsibilities for <u>mutual</u> benefit. E.g. "Set the table;" "Clean up the room;" " Put the crayons away;" "Get the jam."
Sociability	Promote interpersonal conventions & values. Moderate social interaction & communication" E.g. "Say thank you;" "Ask him nicely;" " Sit up at the table;" "Leave me alone;" "Tell Anne about the doll."
Physical Care	Commands concerning feeding, dress, hygiene safety of child. e.g. "Eat your spaghetios" "No candy;" "Comb your hair;" "careful on the stairs"
Self-control	Behavioral and emotional self-regulation. Includes control of aggression, affect and mood, high arousal behaviors, personal conventions and deportment.
Cognitive/play	Commands regulating child's play and cognitive activities. e.g. "Let's play with this;" "Read this story;" "Look, what's this for?" "Tell me what we did here last time;" "Concentrate"

**Protection of objects**

Protection of objects and environment from messy, rough, inappropriate behavior.  
e.g. "Don't write on the wall. Don't spill milk on the table" "Stop throwing blocks around"

**Location/orientation**

Commands regulating child's location or spatial orientation. e.g. "Play in the other room;" "Go over there". "Come here"

Table 2  
Function and Content of Maternal Controls During Toddler Period (Time 1)  
Partial Correlations with Age of Child<sup>1</sup>, SES<sup>2</sup> and Child Compliance<sup>3</sup>

Mother's Commands	Age of Child	SES	Compliance Rate
<u>Function</u>			
Initiation ("Do")	.21**	.16	.05
Prohibition ("Don't")	-.04	-.11	-.20**
Modification ("Change")	-.07	.06	.05
Passive Submission	-.22**	-.01	.28**
Future-oriented	.01	-.02	.09
<u>Content</u>			
Prosocial	-.02	.26**	.19*
Chores	.32***	.11	.11
Sociability	.28***	-.11	-.24**
Physical Care	-.10	.21**	.12
Self-control	-.01	.04	-.09
Cognitive/play	-.09	.00	-.02
Protection of objects	-.34***	-.11	-.15
Location/orientation	-.10	-.35***	.10

\*p < .10; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

<sup>1</sup>Controlling for SES

<sup>2</sup>Controlling for Age

<sup>3</sup>Controlling for SES and Age

Table 3  
Partial Correlations<sup>1</sup> of Maternal Control Function Categories with Maternal  
Control Content Categories. (Toddler Period).

Content of Command	Function of Command				
	Initiation "Do"	Prohibition "Don't"	Modification "Change"	Passive Submission	Future- Oriented
Prosocial	.40***	-.31***	-.05	-.06	.01
Chores	.58***	-.40***	-.01	-.29***	.07
Sociability	.02	.19*	.01	-.34***	.00
Physical Care	-.10	-.28***	.06	.55***	-.13
Self-control	-.28***	.33***	.22***	-.09	-.13
Cognitive/play	.18*	-.15	.12	-.27***	.19*
Protection of objects	-.46***	.45***	-.18*	-.13	.28***
Location/orientation	-.11	.29***	-.18*	.17*	-.27***

\*p < .10; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

<sup>1</sup>Controlling for SES and Age

**Table 4**  
**Partial Correlations<sup>1</sup> Between Functions of Maternal Controls During Toddlerhood**  
**and Children's Compliance and Behavior Problems<sup>2</sup> at Age 5.**

Functions of Commands Toddler Period (Time 1)	Child Behavior at Age 5 (Time 2)		
	Perceived Behavior Problems (CBCL)		
	Compliance	Internalizing	Externalizing
Initiation ("Do")	.33***	-.07	-.25**
Prohibition ("Don't")	-.22*	.07	.19*
Modification ("Change")	.22*	.35***	.33***
Passive Submission	-.44***	-.13	.02
Future-oriented	.11	-.24**	-.12

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ ;

<sup>1</sup>Partial correlations controlling for child compliance at Time 1 and SES

<sup>2</sup>CBCL Achenbach & Edelbrock (1981)

Table 5  
 Partial Correlations<sup>1</sup> Between Contents of Maternal Controls During Toddlerhood  
 and Children's Compliance and Behavior Problems<sup>2</sup> at Age 5.

Contents of Commands Toddler Period (Time 1)	Child Behavior at Age 5 (Time 2)		
	Perceived Behavior Problems (CBCL)		
	Compliance	Internalizing	Externalizing
Prosocial	-.01	-.25**	-.40***
Chores	.24**	-.15	-.26**
Sociability	.30**	.30***	.24**
Physical Care	-.32***	.10	.14
Self-control	-.14	.29**	.43***
Cognitive/play	.36***	.01	.00
Protection of objects	-.09	-.19*	-.09
Location/orientation	-.18	-.25**	-.26**

\*p < .10; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01;

<sup>1</sup>Partial correlations controlling for child compliance at Time 1 and SES

<sup>2</sup>CBCL Achenbach & Edelbrock (1981)